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ABSTRACT

This document presents the conclusions of a Council for Exceptional Children commission that identified barriers to high-quality special education and proposed an action agenda. The commission identified eight issues underlying high teacher attrition rates: (1) ambiguous and competing responsibilities; (2) overwhelming paperwork; (3) inadequate district and administrative support; (4) significant teacher isolation; (5) insufficient focus on improved student outcomes; (6) increased demand for well-qualified special educators; (7) poorly prepared new general and special educators; and (8) fragmented state and provincial licensing systems. Eight recommendations comprise the action agenda: (1) define the roles of special and general educators relative to students with exceptionalities; (2) create the context for high quality practice; (3) leverage time with technology tools and clerical supports to reduce the paperwork burden; (4) standardize decision-making processes; (5) create a career continuum in special education; (6) recruit and prepare sufficient qualified diverse special educators to fill the demand; (7) develop cohesive professional licensure systems; and (8) provide systems supports. Also included are specific recommendations for the following groups: special education teachers, businesses, federal agencies, parents, professional associations, state and provincial agencies, teacher preparation programs, school administrators, and school districts/boards. (DB)

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An Agenda To Achieve
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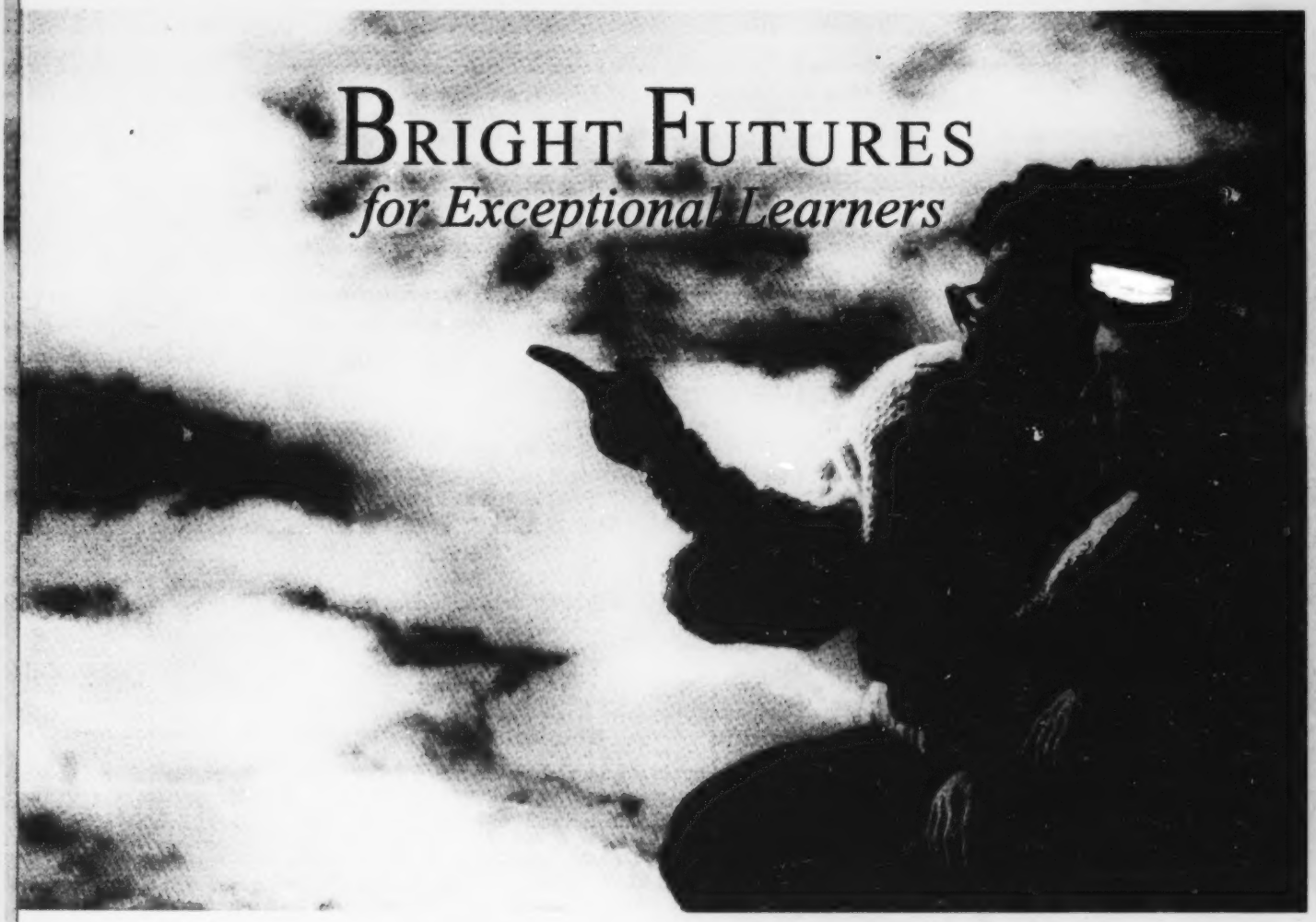

An Agenda To Achieve
Quality Conditions for Teaching & Learning

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THE CHALLENGE

In April 1998, The Council for Exceptional Children appointed a Presidential Commission on the Conditions of Special Education Teaching and Learning. Its charge was twofold:

* ***To identify those barriers that obstruct high-quality special education and***
* ***To develop an action agenda that would galvanize the education community to ensure that every student with an exceptionality has a highly qualified teacher who is able to practice under optimal professional conditions and in suitable settings.***

Whether in special or general education, there is growing evidence that the single most important school influence in a student's education is a well-prepared, caring, and qualified teacher. The connections among the knowledge, skills, and ethics of teachers, the quality of students' educational experiences, and educational accomplishments are strong and undeniable. Yet, too many special educators work under conditions so adverse that they see little hope of achieving success for the students they teach. The plan of action in this report is based on three compelling realities:

* ***Many individuals with exceptionalities do not receive the high-quality education they need to reach successful adult outcomes***
* ***Many special educators teach under conditions that prevent them from delivering high-quality instruction***
* ***Many special educators are asked to fulfill roles that are fragmented, ambiguously defined, and obscured by conflicting responsibilities.***

Individuals' contributions to society and the quality of life that they enjoy are directly related to their educational experiences. If students with exceptionalities do not acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and strategies during their years in school, a life of underachievement, dependency, and discouragement awaits them. The long-term losses experienced by these individuals, their families, and society are immense. In the best of circumstances, successfully teaching individuals with disabilities is exceedingly tough work. Students with disabilities often cannot achieve unless they are taught by the very best teachers using the very best interventions under the very best conditions.

These realities are even more sobering in light of the fact that as we begin a new millennium, there are approximately 30,000 special education positions in the United States alone that are filled by individuals who lack the appropriate special education credentials. By the year 2005, the United

The Challenge
continued

States will need over 200,000 new special educators. Four out of every ten special educators entering the field leave special education before their fifth year of teaching. Not only does the field of special education lack the professional capacity to provide the quantity of services that are required for the millions of identified students with disabilities, but the quality of services being offered, under many of the prevailing conditions, often falls significantly short of what is required to prepare students with exceptionalities to face the demanding complexities of life in the 21st century.

Given the magnitude of the challenge to provide the very best education to those with disabilities, it is clear that no one organization, agency, or group is equal to the task. Accordingly, CEC has issued a call to action to a critical set of partners. The Partners for Action include professional associations, state/provincial and federal agencies, school districts/boards, teacher preparation programs, administrators, teachers, parents, and leaders in business and industry. Collectively, the Partners for Action can make significant things happen.

The members of the Commission base this report on 2 years of intensive research and field work. The findings are based on data collected from hundreds of special and general educators, administrators, and parents as well as national databases and a set of published research studies completed in the last 5 years. A list of these references is available from CEC. In addition, thousands of professionals provided input to the Commission through forums held in Canada and the United States at numerous federation and state/provincial conferences as well as through responses to questionnaires posted on the CEC Web site.

Throughout this document the words state and province are used together to clarify that the findings and action agenda are designed to influence the work of special educators in the United States and Canada. The report also uses two terms to identify students with exceptionalities. Where the data that were collected reference students who are talented and gifted as well as those with disabilities, the term "students with exceptionalities" is used. Where the data refer only to students with disabilities served through mandated special education programs, the term "students with disabilities" is used.

Your challenge as you read and ponder the findings and recommendations that follow is to determine how you can best become a Partner for Action in your sphere of influence. The quality of life of the individuals with disabilities that we seek to serve depends on each of us giving our very best in fulfilling the vision presented in the following pages.

THE FINDINGS

Mounting shortages of special educators are occurring at a time when special educators are asked to perform their roles under difficult and increasingly bureaucratized conditions. Part of the shortage has resulted from the increasing demand for well-qualified, diverse special educators coupled with an increasing population of students who are being identified for special education services. Perhaps even more critical is the loss of seasoned special educators, who are leaving their jobs at almost twice the rate of general educators. Therefore, some of the most difficult to teach students in our schools are often served by inexperienced and unqualified teachers who lack the mentorship of more experienced special educators. Furthermore, the data tell us that inexperienced and unqualified special educators with lower levels of commitment to the field are even more likely to leave. The special education field is facing a crisis of capacity: more students and a growing demand for special educators. To stem the loss of our most accomplished special educators, the field must understand the underlying reasons for the attrition rates and create an effective action agenda. This section identifies and details the most pressing issues:

IMAGINE...

- ***Your dentist practicing without a license.***
- ***Your surgeon operating without appropriate skills.***
- ***Your lawyer routinely being expected to violate professional ethics.***

As intolerable as these situations would be, similar situations commonly occur in special education.

"I'm finishing up the hardest year of 14 years. For the first time I am seriously considering leaving special education."

- ***Ambiguous and competing responsibilities.***
- ***Overwhelming paperwork.***
- ***Inadequate district and administrative support.***
- ***Significant teacher isolation.***
- ***Insufficient focus on improved student outcomes.***
- ***Increased demand for well-qualified special educators.***
- ***Poorly prepared new general and special educators.***
- ***Fragmented state and provincial licensing systems.***

These issues overlap and relate to each other. Together, the burden that they place on the labor of special educators can be oppressive and contributes to the critical shortages of special educators in many states and provinces.

Ambiguous and Competing Responsibilities

Special educators face ambiguous, conflicting, and fragmented expectations from other educators, families, administrators, and the public. Special educators labor under difficult conditions in part because the field is changing so rapidly. For many veteran teachers, the roles and responsibilities they successfully filled in the past have changed dramatically. With multiple expectations and conflicting responsibilities, the causes of the frustrations that special educators express become clear.

"As special educators, we wear many hats. We are required to be case managers, consultants, classroom teachers, secretaries, and disciplinarians."

"My frustration is trying to be 'all things to all people.' I am supposed to keep perfect paperwork, collaborate with regular education teachers, train and grade peer tutors, keep in constant contact with parents, and still find time to teach my students!"

Growing numbers of teachers report being stifled by (a) overwhelming amounts of paperwork, (b) unmanageable caseloads, (c) insufficient administrative support, (d) limited curricular and technological resources, (e) inadequate opportunities to plan with their colleagues, and (f) inadequate professional development opportunities. When one or more of these factors are present, the effects on a teacher's ability to deliver high-quality services can be devastating. Most important, these factors negatively influence the achievement levels and well-being of the students they teach.

Special educators identify their burgeoning caseloads (the number of students for which a special educator is responsible) as a critical concern. Demands for communication with caregivers, collaboration with general educators, adaptations for accessing curriculum, and preparations for high-stakes tests all have increased. We expect special education teachers to do more for students who have increasingly diverse and complex needs with less time, fewer materials, and less support than ever before.

The shift in how special educators spend their time is a reflection of the significant changes that have occurred in the roles of special educators. Many special educators came into the field to work intensively with a small group of students with exceptional needs. Today, they must consult with general educators and work collaboratively with other adults. Intensive individual instruction has been the hallmark of special education. However, 68% of special education teachers report that they spend less than two hours per week in individual instruction with each of their students. While collaboration, co-teaching, coaching, and mentoring may consume more of special educators' time, a manageable caseload bears directly on the quality of instruction and learning of students with exceptionalities. The task of working with others to ensure that students with exceptionalities achieve to high challenging standards requires highly accomplished special education teachers who can collaborate in multiple ways with other practitioners. Presently there is no uniform standard to determine a reasonable caseload.

Responsibilities
continued

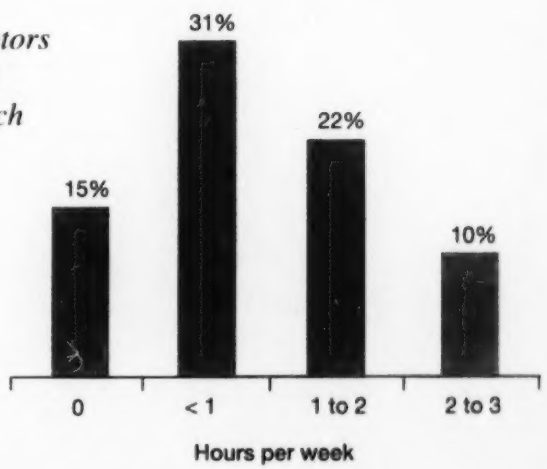
Clearly, fewer students in a caseload and fewer general educators with whom to collaborate are important. However, the answer is not simply lower numbers. Any caseload standard must take into account the learning needs of the students, the array of responsibilities assigned to the special educator, and the supporting resources available.

> ***"Although I deal with over 60 different teachers, there is little time during the day for collaboration with other staff members."***

Special educators identify lack of time to plan as another critical concern. They do not complain about the need for collaboration, rather, they target the lack of time allotted for planning and collaboration as a concern. Students with exceptionalities can achieve high and challenging standards when teams of skilled educators plan, communicate, and collaborate to meet these needs. Yet, the majority of special educators report they spend less than 1 hour per week in actual collaboration with colleagues. What other profession requires collaboration yet allocates little to no time for it?

Since the needs of individuals with exceptionalities are exceedingly diverse and complex, educators must match their assessment and instructional strategies with the needs of their students. Sophisticated and thoughtful planning grounds the design and implementation of successful instruction. To be successful teachers need both sufficient time to plan (individually and with other professionals and paraeducators) and knowledge of effective planning methods to be successful. There is little evidence that today's teachers have sufficient time for doing the types of planning that lead to powerful outcomes.

Time Special Educators Spend in Individual Instruction with Each Student



Overwhelming Paperwork

"When is there time for IEPs and paperwork? I find myself up until 10:00 and 11:00 at night doing IEPs."

"I wish that within my 26 years, one auditor would have asked if my program was successful rather than looking at the paperwork."

Too often procedural compliance is stressed over thoughtful decision making for individuals and families. No barrier is so irksome to special educators as the paperwork that keeps them from teaching. While special educators recognize the importance of individualized education programs (IEPs), they struggle with the amount of clerical work the process requires. The average length of the typical IEP is between 8 and 16 pages, with an estimated 4 hours of premeeting planning time going into each IEP conference.

A majority of special educators estimate that they spend a day or more a week on paperwork and 83% report spending from a half to one and a half days per week in IEP- related meetings. The focus in IEP development seems to be on compliance with the rules and regulations that govern special education services in order to avoid procedural complaints.

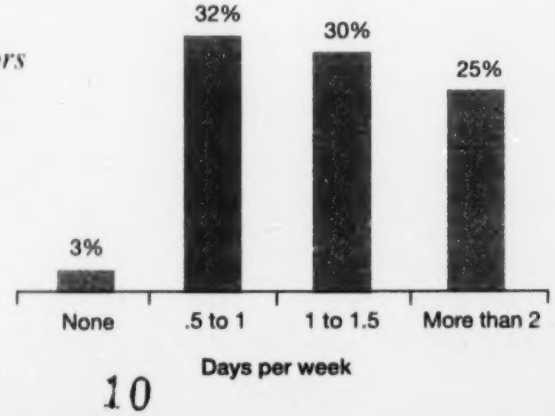
Of course, IEPs are just the beginning of special educators' paperwork responsibilities. Many teachers have the sense that much of the paperwork is designed to "keep the school system out of a lawsuit" rather than to improve the quality of the student's education.

Special educators recognize that the paperwork for documenting individualized decision making is important. However, the need for ways to manage it is acute, yet few special educators indicate that they have appropriate hardware or software for case management. They report that they are often the last in their schools to receive computers, and that they often get the "cast offs." Moreover, while professionals outside of education routinely have clerical support for paperwork tasks, special educators are expected to complete their paperwork without clerical or technological support.

In addition to IEPs, special educators frequently prepare:

1. ***Forms for the central office***
2. ***Letters and notifications***
3. ***Minutes of collaborative team meetings***
4. ***Reports and evaluations of students referred but not placed***
5. ***Medical assistance billing records***
6. ***Telephone logs***
7. ***Child abuse reports***
8. ***Due process documentation***
9. ***Quarterly progress reports***
10. ***Daily/weekly notes to parents***
11. ***Curriculum data reports***
12. ***Grade reports***

Time Special Educators Spend on IEPs and Related Paperwork



Inadequate District and Administrative Support

> ***"The principal refuses to purchase reading curriculum material for my students... When given the option of purchasing [books] one grade level lower than the students actual grade, the answer is NO!"***

High-quality learning conditions can only be achieved with district/board and school supports. This means that administrative support, professional development, and appropriate resources are accessible at all levels of the educational system. Data collected by the Commission are corroborated by several studies in the last 5 years that have reported that administrators lack the knowledge, skills, and time to support services for students with exceptionalities. The impact is profound. Unfortunately, licensing for administrators rarely addresses knowledge, skills, and dispositions to develop, supervise, and evaluate the delivery of high-quality special education and related services or to collaborate with special education leadership. This omission affects administrators responsible for increasing numbers of students with exceptionalities. It is one of the essential reasons for the low retention of special educators.

A reasonable response to the changing demands placed on teachers would be to provide intense and ongoing professional growth opportunities to help them keep pace with new, emerging knowledge and skills for their new roles. Yet, teachers report that this is not happening. Special education teachers, along with their general education colleagues, report dissatisfaction with professional development opportunities related to teaching students with exceptionalities. Special education teachers indicate that, while belonging to professional organizations is important, there are few opportunities for participation. Moreover, far too many school districts/boards still view special education as an afterthought in planning professional development opportunities.

> ***"I have a small, narrow room, with one dry erase board and 15 desks. I do not have access to an overhead [projector]. My school's supply ran out before Special Ed got their equipment."***

Special educators can do effective work only if they are given appropriate resources, materials, and reasonable caseloads. However, they report that they often do not have the materials they need. In many schools, the special education program is still the last on the list for books, instructional materials, classroom space, and equipment.

To make up for some of these shortages, teachers regularly spend their own money on classroom supplies and materials. Results from the Commission survey indicated that $500 per year might be typical for "out of pocket" expenses borne by special educators.

Significant Teacher Isolation

> ***"The school staff for the most part, resents the accommodations which they are asked to make for special needs students."***

Special educators need to be a part of at least two learning communities: one with their school-based general education colleagues and the other with their discipline-based special education colleagues. Instead, too often they feel isolated both from general education teachers and from each other. With few opportunities to collaborate, this sense of separation is often combined with a feeling of powerlessness to influence major decisions and policies that guide their work. This is a difficult combination for any teacher. When combined with the intensity of student needs that special educators face, it can feel overwhelming.

> ***"If consultation with the classroom teacher is to be used effectively, then there must be time built into the day for conferences."***

Moreover, because many of their students have persistent difficulties with learning, motivation, and behavior, special educators can begin to feel ineffective. Rather than fostering collegial support, the intensity of the needs of students with exceptionalities may in fact exacerbate the isolation of the special education teacher.

Insufficient Focus on Improved Student Outcomes

> ***"Most of us got into special education because we wanted to teach, to work with kids, and it seems like that aspect of the job is taking a back seat to the administrative duties."***

The majority of special educator time is spent on activities that do not result in improved student learning outcomes. Teaching has always been a demanding profession. However, general and special education teachers in today's schools encounter a unique set of pressures that makes providing high-quality instruction to all students especially challenging. In recent years, general education teachers have been expected to teach more complex content to a higher level of mastery. Higher content standards are being met in classrooms where growing ability, linguistic, religious, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity flourish. To help each student achieve high-quality learning results, teachers must select instructional approaches and strategies that match the learning needs of the individual students.

Unfortunately, too many widely adopted approaches to teaching in specific content areas lack evidence of successful learning outcomes. Furthermore, many learning approaches, materials, and interventions are ineffective for students with exceptionalities. In spite of available research identifying teaching methods and strategies that produce learning results, valuable instructional time is spent using weak teaching strategies.

Increased Demand for Well-Qualified Special Educators

The number of unqualified individuals teaching in special education continues to rise in Canada and the United States. The most recent data show that in the United States over 30,000 teachers without appropriate licenses are teaching students with disabilities. In fact, in some urban and rural schools close to half of the teachers in special education are unqualified. Thousands of special education positions remain vacant while tens of thousands of children with exceptionalities receive services from teachers with too many students on their caseloads.

Special educators daily confront teaching and learning conditions that frustrate their use of high quality research-validated instruction. Rather than continue to confront these barriers, many special educators leave the profession each year. They leave at almost twice the rate of their general education colleagues. In fact, four out of every ten entering special educators have left before their fifth year.

Each year college and university programs in the United States prepare approximately 17,000 special education teachers, only about half the number needed annually to fill special educator vacancies. The U.S. Department of Labor conservatively estimates that schools will need more than 200,000 new special educators in the next 5 years. The trends are similar in Canada. Furthermore, while communities continue to grow in diversity, special education, like general education, remains an overwhelmingly white and female profession.

Poorly Prepared New General and Special Educators

Many new general and special education teachers are finding that they have been prepared for jobs that no longer exist and that they are not equipped for the jobs they face. In fact, general education teachers at both the elementary and secondary levels reported dissatisfaction with their preservice preparation for teaching students with exceptionalities.

Too often, special education teacher preparation programs operate outside of national accreditation standards, and these programs face little in the way of consequences. When a program operates without professional accreditation, students do not have assurance that they are receiving the validated knowledge and skills of the profession.

Fragmented State and Provincial Licensing Systems

> ***"Our lawmakers should spend a day in the life of a special educator."***

The requirements for receiving licensure as a special educator vary from state to state and province to province. Some localities require undergraduate degrees in special education from accredited special educator preparation programs. Other localities require study beyond a bachelor degree. A teacher with full licensure and several years of experience in one jurisdiction can fail to meet the requirements for licensure in another jurisdiction. Consequently, special educators who move from one locality to another may be unable to qualify for a teaching position. Recruitment efforts across jurisdictional boundaries are often disappointing for the employer since a candidate for a teaching position may not be able to qualify for licensure in the prospective employer's state or province.

Further complicating the licensure issue are the various approaches to licensing that include licensing special educators to teach students with a specific type of disability (i.e., categorical licensing), students across a range of disabilities (i.e., multicategorical licensing), and students within a specific age range (i.e., early childhood, elementary, or secondary). Therefore, a teacher may have a master's degree in special education and have several years of successful experience but be unable to teach in another locality.

THE ACTION AGENDA

Ultimately, work on the conditions of teaching and shortages of special educators must achieve these three outcomes:

1. ***That every student with exceptionalities receives individualized services and supports from caring and competent professional educators.***
2. ***That every special and general educator has the teaching and learning conditions to practice effectively.***
3. ***That every instructional leader establishes strong expectations for the use of effective and validated instructional practices.***

To achieve these outcomes requires collective action from all constituencies. Together, these constituencies or Partners for Action must ensure that the teaching and learning conditions that make a difference in the learning results of students with exceptionalities are present in every school for every student with an exceptional need. To realize this vision, the Commission calls upon the educational community and the public to endorse the three outcomes and to become partners with CEC to implement the following recommendations in the action agenda:

* ***Define the roles of special and general educators relative to students with exceptionalities.***
* ***Create the context for high quality practice.***
* ***Leverage time with technology tools and clerical supports to reduce the paperwork burden.***
* ***Standardize decision-making processes.***
* ***Create a career continuum in special education.***
* ***Recruit and prepare sufficient qualified diverse special educators to fill the demand.***
* ***Develop cohesive professional licensure systems.***
* ***Provide systems supports.***

Define the Roles of Special and General Educators Relative to Students with Exceptionalities

Special and general educators must work collegially to ensure that the highest possible number of students with exceptionalities successfully accesses the important concepts and skills in the general education curriculum. General educators bring rich curriculum and content-specific resources, materials, and knowledge, while special educators bring rich knowledge and resources in strategically altering instructional variables for students with exceptionalities and for teaching them the skills to become self-determined, achieving citizens. Special educators also bring expertise in intensive and focused instruction. This expertise is the hallmark of special educators, and at no time has it been more important to students with exceptionalities. Skilled special educators understand the fundamental principles and applications of effective instruction, including models for providing intensive instruction, increasing opportunities for feedback,

Defining Roles
continued

modeling, planned generalization, and additional practice and reinforcement. They understand the scope and sequence of the core curriculum across age and grade levels, and they work collegially to accommodate or adapt curricula to meet the needs of individual students with exceptionalities.

Special educators must have clear responsibilities and reasonable caseloads to be able to share their expertise directly with the students they teach and the colleagues with whom they consult and collaborate. Results for students will be achieved when educators act collectively to integrate special and general educator expertise in their teaching practices.

Create the Context for High Quality Practice

Like architecture, medicine, and law, teaching requires continuous professional growth. Efforts to improve the conditions of teaching must be grounded in principles of effective and ethical practice, and the vision must incorporate the research about teaching and learning. Over the past 25 years, a broad array of instructional methods has been validated in classroom contexts. These teaching procedures have been demonstrated to make a significant and meaningful difference in the performance of students with exceptional needs. These powerful tools must be placed in the hands of every special educator.

This vision for special education teaching and learning requires concerted effort on the part of teachers and other practitioners; administrators; parents; and local, state/province, and national decision makers. Only together can we align the conditions for teaching with what we know about high-quality educational practices that result in learning for all students. Additionally, professional development programs must meet at least three standards.

First, the content should emphasize the research- and experience-validated knowledge base of the profession; that is, those practices that have been demonstrated to bring about significant and meaningful changes in the learning of students with exceptionalities.

Second, the curriculum should be organized to provide teachers with sufficient detail, examples, demonstrations, and formative practice to use the new instructional practice. Currently, most professional development experiences are uncoordinated, highly fragmented, and unrelated to the classroom realities faced by teachers. Few result in a genuine development of new competencies by teachers.

Third, the curriculum should be based on adult learning principles that significantly facilitate professional development. Such principles as providing educators a voice in designing professional development experiences, modeling, peer coaching, and multiple opportunities for formative practice must be prominent. In addition, learning to teach must include more extensive experiences in classrooms earlier and more consistently.

Leverage Time with Technology Tools and Clerical Supports to Reduce the Paperwork Burden

Team assessments, collaborative goal setting, and instructional planning all require time to discuss and analyze student performance and make adjustments in where, when, and how students will be taught. This process also requires documentation. However, the tyranny of paperwork overshadows the thoughtful planning needed for individualized student instruction.

Schools must leverage the time spent in these critical activities by providing teachers with the technology they need for electronic case management, communication, record keeping, data analysis, and ongoing instructional modifications and accommodations. In an era when business is able to connect globally, teachers rarely have the equipment and proficiencies to connect from classroom to classroom. Schools need to harness technology, linking networks with powerful computers for every special educator.

Furthermore, many of the paperwork tasks in special education are routine. Preparing due process notices, completing district forms, tracking reevaluation timelines, and organizing special education records are just a few of the tasks that can be completed by clerical support personnel. By providing less costly clerical personnel for these tasks, the time of special educators can be focused on teaching and learning activities.

Standardize Decision-Making Processes

Districts/boards, schools, and teachers should be able to use a universal set of processes for documenting effective and complete assessments, program planning, and student progress. Special educators should have standard tools to document these processes. Time efficiency demands that the field develop and use a universal design for these documentation activities. Policies at the province/state level and the district or board level should require only necessary documentation. Then, time can be allocated for staff to complete the needed documentation.

Create a Career Continuum in Special Education

The factors that directly impact teachers' ability to do the job well and their sense of job satisfaction - a sense of collegiality and professionalism, an environment of mutual and frequent collaboration, a climate of support, the availability of resources, and clarity of responsibilities - influence the conditions for effectively teaching children with exceptionalities.

From the very beginning, the education community must view the preparation of special educators as the mutual responsibility of both higher education and public education. Teacher preparation programs must ensure that special education teacher candidates have a breadth of experiences in school settings that prepare candidates for the daily challenges that special educators face. Together, teacher preparation programs and school systems can actively participate in the preparation of preservice teacher candidates through professional development schools or other types of mutually strategic partnerships. These partnerships can improve the quality of teachers entering the field, increase the opportunities for ongoing professional development, and create a career ladder for accomplished teachers who mentor their colleagues.

Particularly in rural and urban communities, recruitment of community members as paraeducators and teachers can help to ensure that the next generation of educators is both tied to the community and reflects its diversity.

Recruit and Prepare Sufficient Qualified Diverse Special Educators to Fill the Demand

The Partners for Action must implement coordinated recruitment campaigns targeting secondary students as well as career changers. The states and provinces, in coordination with national agencies, must ensure that programs that prepare special education teachers have the capacity to prepare sufficient numbers of qualified diverse special educators.

Develop Cohesive Professional Licensure Systems

The need for qualified diverse special educators to meet the educational needs of the students with disabilities in our schools is far too great to limit access to the pool of teachers unnecessarily. A qualified special educator in one jurisdiction should be qualified in another locality. Standardization of the licensure requirements for each state and province would allow teachers to apply for jobs where the jobs are. CEC has validated professional standards for special education preparation programs. Partners for Action should align with these standards. Using the CEC standards as the basis for accrediting preparation programs as well as licensing beginning teachers can vastly increase opportunities for cohesive professional licensure systems in special education.

Provide Systems Supports

CEC, with the Partners for Action, should develop clear guidelines for special educator job roles and responsibilities in conjunction with caseload guidelines. School districts and boards have the potential to improve teacher motivation and support other reforms for individuals with exceptionalities by making changes in the teacher salary system. Teachers who document their accomplishments against recognized standards should qualify for salary incentives. Such approaches have the potential to retain teachers in their educational careers.

Central and building-level administrators need to work with special educators to redesign and make explicit special educator responsibilities. Systems support means that district/board and school administrators who understand the responsibilities of special educators collaborate with and support their special educators. Administrators provide leadership and organizational stability to ensure that special educators have the time, resources, reasonable caseloads, and collegial atmosphere to ensure that every student with an exceptionality has a high-quality education.

Inadequate resources, lack of relevant information, limited decision-making authority, and noncollegial school cultures are some of the variables that need to be addressed. Ongoing assessment of the conditions of teaching within school districts and boards could provide valuable local data for continuous improvement cycles.

PARTNERS FOR ACTION:

Strategies for Change

In this section, the Commission lists some specific recommendations for each of the partner constituencies. The strategies are not exhaustive, but they can pave the way for building capacity in special education to ensure that every student with an exceptionality has a bright future. CEC invites our Partners for Action to begin with these strategies and develop additional strategies.

Quality Teachers	Quality Conditions	Quality Interventions	Strategies
Special Education Teachers			
•	•	•	Participate in initiatives such as Bright Futures to improve services for students with exceptionalities and the conditions for teaching.
•	•	•	Collaborate with general and special education colleagues and participate in professional learning communities.
•	•	•	Participate in professional associations and abide by the associations' ethical and practice standards.
•			Ensure one is adequately prepared and qualified for one's position and responsibilities.
•			Seek advanced training, recognition, and certification.
•			Actively encourage individuals including individuals from diverse groups to consider careers in special education.
•			Support the induction of beginning special education teachers and serve as mentors for them.
		•	Ensure that one's professional development plan includes appropriate activities to remain current and proficient regarding research-validated practice.
Businesses			
•			Support efforts to make teacher salaries attractive and competitive.
•			Ask about special education teaching conditions and the qualifications of the individuals teaching special education.
	•		Offer expertise in technology, communication, and management information systems.
		•	Seek information from the school districts and boards that require the use of validated and effective instructional practices.
Federal Agencies			
•		•	Encourage states to adopt policies that assist teachers to learn and apply practices that have been research validated.
•			Encourage states and provinces to align professional licensure and program accreditation requirements with professionally recognized standards.
•			Obtain and disseminate information regarding the supply of and demand for qualified diverse special educators.
•			Ensure a sufficient capacity in special education personnel preparation programs to provide a cohort of qualified diverse special educators.
•			Provide funding and support to encourage the use of effective practices in personnel preparation and continuing development programs.
•			Provide preservice programs with the resources to attract and prepare a sufficient supply of qualified and diverse special educators.
•			Encourage states and provinces to improve pay incentives for educators based on knowledge and skills.

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Quality Teachers	Quality Conditions	Quality Interventions	Strategies
FEDERAL AGENCIES (CONTINUED)			
	•		Provide funding for training of educational administrators regarding special education programs.
	•		Encourage states to adopt streamlined procedures for all aspects of the special education decision-making process.
•			Provide funding and support to encourage states to provide technology and clerical support to special educators.
	•		Explicitly include special education in initiatives such as class size (caseload) reductions.
		•	Require that demonstration, dissemination, and technical assistance projects emphasize research-validated practices.
PARENTS			
	•	•	Ask about the research that supports the IEP interventions for one's child and about the teacher's caseload.
•			Insist that one's child has special and general education teachers who are fully licensed in the area(s) in which they are practicing.
•			Work with the school leadership to ensure that the school personnel reflect the diversity of the larger community and nation.
	•		Insist on reasonable caseloads and class sizes.
		•	Ask whether the school and district have policies for using validated practices and how the policies are enforced.
PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS			
•	•	•	Provide standards and guidance to states and provinces along the professional career continuum in such areas as preparing and licensing professionals, ethical and practice standards, mentoring, and continuing development.
•		•	Provide options and resources for professional growth.
•			Provide leadership for the national accreditation of preservice preparation programs.
•			Assist teacher education programs in preparing teachers to help students with exceptionalities to achieve significant and challenging outcomes in both special and general education.
•			Promote the special education profession to the public to encourage diverse individuals to consider special education careers.
	•		Advocate for conditions of teaching and learning that enable teachers to help students with exceptionalities to achieve significant and challenging outcomes in both special and general education.
	•		Collect and disseminate relevant information on the state of special education conditions such as guidance on reasonable caseloads.
	•		Collaborate with programs that prepare education leadership to ensure that practicing administrators have knowledge of special education organizational structures and instructional practices.
		•	Provide for the dissemination of validated instructional practices.

continued

Quality Teachers	Quality Conditions	Quality Interventions	Strategies
STATE AND PROVINCIAL AGENCIES			
•	•	•	Ensure that school and district/board improvement plans include opportunities for professional collaboration and development.
•		•	Require periodic renewal of professional credentials based on both successful teaching and completion of an individualized professional development plan.
•			Improve pay incentives for educators based on knowledge and skills.
•			Collaborate with professional associations to align state or province teacher licensure and program accreditation standards with professionally recognized standards.
•			Encourage special education teacher preparation programs and local school districts/boards to form substantial partnerships for mentoring and induction of beginning special educators
•			Require mentoring for beginning special educators for at least 1 year by another special educator in a similar position.
•			Provide adequate budgets for mentorship and induction programs that adhere to the professionally recognized guidelines.
•			Provide preservice programs with the resources to attract and prepare a sufficient supply of qualified and diverse special educators.
•			Provide incentives for a variety of ongoing professional development programs, including supporting advanced degrees and certification in areas of professional specialization.
•			Ensure a sufficient capacity in special education personnel preparation programs to provide a cohort of qualified diverse special educators.
	•		Adopt streamlined procedures for all aspects of the special education decision-making process.
	•		Explicitly include special education in initiatives such as class size (caseload) reductions.
	•		Ensure that each educator has access to appropriate hardware and software technology, as well as appropriate training.
	•		Provide funding and support to provide clerical support to special educators.
	•		Require systematic, state- or province-wide audit of paperwork processes, including their efficiency and the provision of resources to complete them.
		•	Require that schools demonstrate that they are using research-validated practices in order to qualify for state or provincial funding.
		•	Ensure that all appropriate state- or province-supported staff development efforts emphasize training in the use of research-validated practices.

continued

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Quality Teachers	Quality Conditions	Quality Interventions	Strategies
TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS			
•	•	•	Integrate appropriate knowledge and skills for educating students with exceptionalities throughout general teacher and administrator preparation programs.
•	•	•	Collaborate with school districts and boards to create professional development opportunities for both preservice and inservice teachers.
•		•	Ensure that programs prepare teachers in current research validated practice.
•			Recruit and support individuals with disabilities to become teachers and administrators.
•			Recruit and support individuals from diverse cultural and linguistic groups to become teachers and administrators.
•			Ensure that initial teacher education programs prepare teachers to accomplish their professional responsibilities.
•			Base preparation programs for beginning special educators on the validated and recognized knowledge and skill standards of CEC.
•			Ensure that initial teacher education programs prepare teachers to use technology effectively for program management as well as for curriculum and instruction.
•			Encourage active membership by students and faculty in professional associations.
•			Model the reciprocity of roles and collaboration among disciplines expected of special and general educators.
	•		Prepare teachers to work in both discipline-specific and cross-disciplinary professional communities to exchange and generate new knowledge.
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS			
•			Recruit and support individuals with disabilities to become teachers and administrators.
•			Recruit and support individuals from diverse cultural and linguistic groups to become teachers and administrators.
•			Provide opportunities for teachers to pursue professional growth activities.
•			Only hire appropriately licensed teachers.
•			Encourage special education personnel to be active in their professional associations.
	•		Organize the school so that school professionals can collaborate and plan together.
	•		Ensure that administrators have the knowledge and skills for supporting special education school-based services and for collaborating with special education leadership.
	•		Assign trained clerical support personnel to special educators.

continued

Quality Teachers	Quality Conditions	Quality Interventions	Strategies
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS CONTINUED			
•			Recognize, include, and overtly support special education services and personnel.
	•		Provide staff development on practices that are research validated.
	•		Evaluate teachers on their use of research-validated practices.
	•		Publicize the school's use of research-validated practices.
SCHOOL DISTRICTS/BOARDS			
•			Streamline recruitment procedures to attract fully qualified diverse special educators.
•			Provide incentives such as tuition scholarships for special educators to continue their professional development.
•			Require mentoring for beginning special educators for at least 1 year by another special educator in a similar position.
•			Adopt a policy of only hiring appropriately licensed special education teachers.
	•		Provide salary structures to attract and retain qualified diverse special educators.
	•		Provide state-of-the-art case management hardware and software and clerical support to every special educator.
	•		Provide financial support and training for clerical personnel to support special educators in carrying out paperwork requirements.
	•		Clarify the responsibilities of special education teachers and provide reasonable caseloads in line with the responsibilities.
		•	Require every school to demonstrate that it uses research-validated practices.
		•	Monitor IEPs to ensure that interventions are research validated.

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About CEC

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), founded in 1922, is the preeminent member-based organization of special educators with 50,000 members across the United States, Canada, and the world. Since its inception over 75 years ago, CEC has provided leadership in special education. Over the years, CEC has championed high quality services for children with exceptionalities and for the people who educate them.

- CEC's legacy of legislative advocacy makes certain that the needs and concerns of special educators are heard at the local, state/provincial, and federal levels.
- CEC's professional standards assure that special educators are well prepared and practice within the ethics of the profession.
- CEC's professional journals, products, and continuing education opportunities provide special educators with the latest information to keep their knowledge and skills current.

THE COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

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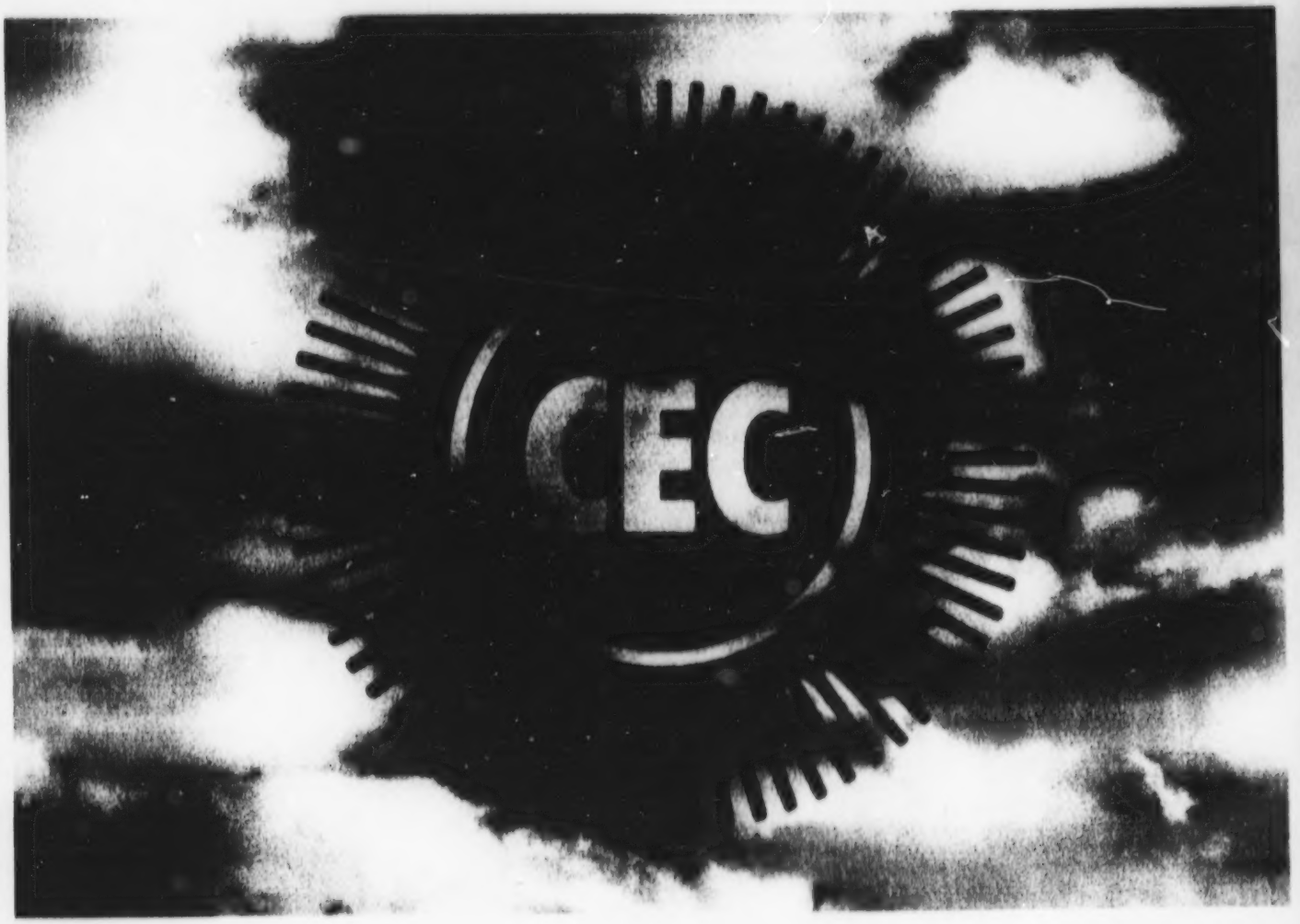
The Council for Exceptional Children



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